

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

Statement of Brett KenCairn
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Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
on Effective Community Involvement in National Forest Restoration

March 29th, 2001

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Good morning, my name is Brett KenCairn. I am the Executive Director of Indigenous Community Enterprises, a non-profit organization based at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. ICE was founded to work with tribes in northern Arizona to identify new economic development opportunities utilizing the small diameter wood resources being removed in thinning and forest restoration treatments. Our first product is affordable housing for Navajos in the shape of traditional hogans. The project is creating a state-of-the art pole processing infrastructure that will be used to develop a much larger set of products using the thinning products most difficult to economically remove, particularly material less than 9" in diameter.

Before helping to found ICE, I was the Director for the Grand Canyon Forests Foundation, the non-profit organization founded to coordinate restoration activities in the urban wildland interface around Flagstaff. I have also worked for over 10 years in the Pacific Northwest as Director of the Rogue Institute for Ecology and Economy. In this capacity I was a founding member of the Applegate Partnership and a variety of other natural resource collaborations in that area. I am founding member of the National Network of Forest Practitioners and am familiar with many of the leaders of partnerships and collaborations around the west.

From this base of experience I make the following observations regarding collaboration in public lands management:

1. I believe collaborative processes have great promise for developing innovative approaches to land management.
2. However, federal land management agencies, particularly the Forest Service, is consistently failing to be an effective partner in these forest management collaboratives for the following reasons
 - Agency delays and inconclusive planning processes are using up the limited supply of volunteer time and hope existing in rural communities.
 - Long delays in implementing projects are resulting in the loss of the limited base of industrial infrastructure left in these communities.

- Frequent errors and missteps are discrediting the notion of community-based conservation both locally and nationally.
1. This failure jeopardizes the well-being of many of the participating rural communities and is substantially undermining the public credibility of community-based organizations in their attempt to champion active stewardship and restoration of public lands.
 2. There are a series of steps that can substantially improve the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

I have attached a report I wrote for the Forest Service entitled *Public Agencies in Collaboration Panacea to Gridlock or the Next Big Debacle*. This report outlines five case studies profiling many of the problems consistently being experienced by community forestry advocates across the country. It also summarizes the views of over a dozen community forestry advocates across the West and offers 17 recommendations for improving agency performance in collaboration.

In my time remaining, I would like to highlight 5 of these recommendations for your consideration.

Recommendations

1. Demonstrate Agency commitment to collaboration at the top by insuring and promoting support for innovators and risk takers.

The best collaborative work taking place in the agencies right now is the result of a few brave risk takers that often have to work against huge institutional resistance to make effective partnerships work. The agency must create a culture that supports and encourages this type of innovation. This may require the established liaisons to priority collaboratives. These will need to be individuals with a high degree of commitment and personal investment in these efforts and line officer or greater authority level.

2. Provide Agencies with adequate resources and training to be effective partners.

Despite the best intentions of many agency units, they cannot be effective partners in collaboratives because they lack two key resources: training in how to be effective collaborators, and money and personnel to support their roles in these projects. If Congress wants agencies to be more effective partners, it must provide the agencies with adequate resources to do so. This may require a specific national line item in the Forest Service budget to support staff working specifically community-based collaboratives.

3. Develop more proactive outreach to key stakeholders, especially personal and informal.

Too many collaboratives and partnerships assume that their obligation for involvement is fulfilled by simply issuing invitations to participate in formal group meetings. Very often the groups most likely to challenge the work of these initiatives will not participate despite such invitations. If agencies want to be effective, they must recognize that involvement requires both formal and informal outreach. Agency line officers, Supervisors and Regional Foresters should be expected to and evaluated on their conducting regular ongoing informal contact with their most outspoken and effective critics to establish and maintain effective communication.

4. Develop safeguards that prevent preoccupation with economic efficiency and profit maximizing from

exploiting forests and communities.

One of the issues that the agencies has consistently failed to respond directly to is the role of commercial motives and economic efficiencies in implementing forestry and restoration activities. Consistently we hear agencies and others attempt to dismiss the Zero-cut activists and those who question commercial uses of public land resources as simply out of touch with reality. This dismissal fails to recognize how significant and pervasive this distrust of commercial motives runs in the broader public. A recent Business Week front cover stated that over 60% of the American public now distrusts corporations and their commitment to civic responsibility. Backlash against Home Depot and other forestry and wood products firms is also an indication of growing public skepticism of commercial motives in forestry.

We need to recognize the historical legitimacy of this concern. Much of the past management of public forest was based on maximizing timber harvests. At the same time the average wage in rural communities was dropping into the basement due to agency lowest bidder contracting mechanisms designed to maximize economic efficiency. If we are to rebuild public confidence, Congress needs to seek balanced council on how to protect both forests and communities from the unrestrained preoccupation with economic returns. Congress should direct the formation of special task force or advisory committee comprising all of the major interests affected by this issue needs to formulate a set of safeguards that can protect both forests and communities.

1. Develop relevant measures of success with the public. FUND MONITORING, both ecological and social/economic.

Without extensive and clearly defined monitoring programs, both ecological and social/economic, there will be no way to assure a skeptical public that the Agency is really conducting activities that are beneficial to the land and communities. Others have emphasized the importance of developing robust ecological monitoring programs. Most efforts, however, have little or no clear criteria for evaluating the quality and durability of purported economic benefits. More than the number of jobs created, we need to know: what these jobs pay (including benefit availability); what kinds of skills and abilities they require or develop in the local workforce; who will get the jobs (local, migrant, imported); how long they are likely to last and the key factors in their durability (public subsidies, market forces, mobility of the target industry); and where the profits generated by these labors will be deposited—will they be retained locally, or will they be exported; what the impact on local services and infrastructure will be; what the likelihood is of the enterprises being locally owned and controlled or foreign (external to the community) controlled.

Finally, as a collective of community-based forestry initiatives, we are becoming increasingly aware of how larger policies, particularly trade, are adversely affecting both forests and communities. The passage of NAFTA and its impact on the trade of wood products in particular are responsible for dismantling much of what remains of the forest products infrastructure in our communities.

The loss of rural communities is seen as the regrettable but inevitable result of the modernization and globalization of trade. What we are rapidly learning, however, is that the maintenance of healthy forest ecosystems requires a sustained investment by a well-trained workforce supported by an adequate infrastructure that can utilize the by-products of this stewardship. The existing infrastructure of rural communities is the most logical and effective foundation from which to implement and maintain this preventative maintenance and stewardship. Without them, many ecosystems will continue to unravel, fires like those in Los Alamos will become common, and the larger health and well being of both American lands and American communities will suffer. The perceived benefits of "free trade" must be considered in this

larger view of consequences and effects.

To bring these issues back home, Indigeous Community Enterprises is designed to make use of the most difficult to utilize by-products from forest restoration (trees less than 9" in diameter). We are using limited amounts of public money to leverage over \$750,000 in private an charitable investments in the creation of a local enterprise and local workforce capacity to create new uses, particularly affordable housing, from materials the agency currently can't afford to take out of the woods. We will create employment and affordable housing in rural communities with over 40% unemployment, a per capita income 1/3 of the national average, and a high school drop out rate approaching 50%.

If however, Congress and the agencies do not make a significant and sustained investment in supporting and protecting these community-based efforts, we will likely witness the continued deterioration of both the forests and the forest-based communities of the American West.

I appreciate the opportunity to have made this presentation in front of you today. I would be happy to answer any questions regarding the issues I have raised before you today.

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